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ADVISE & DISSENT

OPINION



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RUSSIA'S PLAN FOR TAKING OVER THE MIDDLE EAST

When President Carter warned the Soviet Union to stay out of the Persian Gulf, I suppose I should have felt vindicated. But his sudden awakening gave me little satisfaction, because it came too late and fell far short of a full awareness of the real danger and pervasiveness of the Soviet threat.

It's been many years since, as a young Russian who hated the Soviet system and admired American ways, I became a U.S. agent. Until I had to escape, I passed information to the Americans while working as a Soviet diplomat in the Middle East. I assumed that I wasn't the only source of information and that the Americans were aware that the Soviet leadership was moving forward with a long-term, sophisticated, multi-faceted campaign to pull Mideastern nations one by one into the Soviet camp and thereby gain a stranglehold on Western oil supplies.

But I have watched with pain and dismay as Washington, apparently believing in détente instead of in its own intelligence data, has pursued a complacent, confusing, naive, inconsistent, and suicidal Middle Eastern policy while the American public has remained largely ignorant of the gains the Soviets have continued to make. Even today I hear so-called experts naively trying to explain away things like the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as "defensive" or wishfully theorizing about Islam as a barrier to communism.

I can vouch for the effectiveness of this Soviet campaign because I was intimately involved in carrying it out. I attended Moscow's prestigious Institute of International Relations, which trains cadres for the Soviet diplomatic corps and other intelligence and foreign-policy organizations, during the early 1960s, when the Central Committee of the Communist party of the Soviet Union had already formulated what was to become Soviet strategy in the Mideast. Under the CC's directive the institute concentrated on training Arabists and other Middle East specialists to form an elite corps. I was in one of the first graduating classes of Arabists, who now number more than 2,200, all fluent in local languages, conversant with Islamic laws, history, customs, and sensibilities and regional economics and politics, and trained in military tactics, intelligence gathering, propaganda techniques, and recruitment.

The Middle Eastern policies to which I was introduced at the Moscow institute gave the region top priority, emphasizing it as the means to break the back of Western imperialism. The Soviet Mideast experts with whom I studied were already looking forward to the time when the Persian Gulf states would be able to raise prices of their petroleum, upon which the West would be increasingly dependent.

Pyotr V. Milogradov, a high-ranking Soviet authority, gave me an overview of Soviet strategy for the seventies and eighties: "First we'll raise the Arabs' awareness about imperialist evils," he told me. "Then we'll get OPEC on our side. Then they'll see how they've been robbed blind by the oil companies and retaliate by raising prices." That, he went on to say, was only an interim goal. The ultimate aim was and is to put the Middle East under Soviet domination. With the Soviets in

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control of their oil, Western Europe and Japan would be neutralized and the United States isolated. The resulting economic pressures would stimulate social and political changes that would bring about the fall of imperialism by peaceful means, according to Soviet projections.

This is to be accomplished through coordinated political, ideological, economic, and military operations, overt and covert. A key aspect has been to take advantage of Arab-Israeli conflict and gain Arab sympathy by backing the Palestinians. The Soviet Union also cultivates Arab friends by depicting itself as a country where Islam and communism go hand-in-hand in building a "new society." (The Soviet Moslem population soon will number more than 100 million, and many Soviet Moslems are assigned to Middle Eastern posts.)

The Soviets assiduously recruit agents, allies, and friends in every important military, government, student, and religious organization in the region. I was given intensive training in this art, and, once I was stationed in the Middle East, one of my major duties was to spot potential recruits. Many young, ambitious, and idealistic students end up in Moscow or at Soviet guerrilla training centers. The Soviets go to great lengths to recruit local government officials, military and political officers, religious leaders, teachers, union leaders, and businessmen—anyone with influence. The means include ideological salesmanship; taking advantage of local rivalries; secret help with one's career; providing liquor, women, and compromising favors; and, as in the case of an Egyptian naval officer whom I knew, outright bribery and blackmail. Soviet women are even recruited by the KGB to marry Arabs and become local Mata Haris.

The tactics employed in the region are tailored to each country's political realities. In those countries that are reluctant to establish a direct partnership with Moscow—for example, Saudi Arabia, the Arab Emirates of the Persian Gulf, or (before it was overthrown) the shah's regime in Iran—the Soviet government pursues friendly relations openly while secretly backing revolutionary groups against them. These revolutionaries need not be Marxist; they can be Islamic or nationalist so long as they are strongly anti-American and above all, show promise of being winners.

While stationed in Yemen, for example, I acted as Arabic translator at meetings between KGB men and top operatives of insurgent groups operating on the Arabian peninsula and in the Persian Gulf emirates. Their followers were made up of nationalist groups in the rugged countryside complemented by cadres of oil field workers, clerks, students, and so on. I also helped arrange for Soviet spy flights over Saudi Arabia to map secret infiltration and supply routes for insurgents sponsored by the Soviets out of North Yemen and, later, South Yemen.

Once an anti-American nationalist government is established, the next phase of Soviet tactics goes into effect. The Soviets move in with economic and military aid and blandishments about brotherhood, solidarity, and mutuality of goals. The new regime is encouraged to pattern its political institu-

tions, government, military, and internal-security organizations after those in the Soviet Union. KGB and East German advisers often are moved in.

The final goal is to purge so-called reactionary elements from the revolution and turn the new regime from a nationalist to a Sovietized one, as now has happened in South Yemen, Syria, and Iraq. These pro-Soviet regimes, in turn, discourage neighboring states, especially Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman, from leaning too far toward the United States, and in the case of OPEC members Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, and Algeria, they push for the most crippling possible hikes in oil prices. Political tactics are coordinated with economic programs, which give the KGB the opportunity to bring in agents.

Soviet military power is the backbone of this political strategy. Since the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, the Soviet Union has accelerated development of both nuclear and conventional arms. By 1970 the U.S.S.R. had already begun to surpass the U. S. in most military areas.

This extensive military-political-ideological-economic warfare is not entrusted to any one Soviet department—not even the KGB. A secret elite cadre of powerful operatives reporting directly to the Central Committee was fielded to direct and coordinate operations, most of which require inter-organizational, military, intelligence, and diplomatic teamwork. In Cairo I worked directly under one such CC operative, who ostensibly was only a counselor to the embassy but in reality held extraordinary powers that cut across lines of command.

There is every indication that Soviet strategy continues unchanged and is moving forward with great success. For example, the fanatics who were involved in the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca were among those I had heard mentioned as part of the Soviet-sponsored People's Front of the Arabian Peninsula. This bloody attack, blamed on the United States through calumny spread rapidly throughout the Moslem world in typically efficient Soviet fashion, was a warning to the Saudis to refrain from favoring Washington.

There have been occasional setbacks, but the long-term consistent nature of Soviet policy compensates for them. Some reversals even have been turned to advantage—for example, Egyptian president Anwar Sadat's shift toward the United States and peace agreements with Israel, which the Soviets have used to rally the rest of the Arab countries.

In Afghanistan the Soviets realize that, because little love is lost between non-Arab and Arab Moslems, the invasion only will serve as added intimidation for surrounding states and get the Soviets closer to an Arabian Sea naval base from which they can command the Persian Gulf—a goal mentioned to me often by Soviet naval officers.

By far the greatest advantage the Soviets have enjoyed in the Middle East has been the ineffectual policies of the United States. When I was stationed in Kuwait, the Soviet ambassador there ordered me to write a detailed report of what the Americans were doing in this area. My report said that they weren't doing much of anything. I wished then, as I do now, that my information had been false. O—